

Mr. J.T. Noblin, Clerk  
United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi  
United States Courthouse  
245 East Capitol Street  
Jackson MS 39201

*3:04cv 251*

May 3, 2007

Re: Comments on the proposed Olivia Y. settlement

I am writing this letter to the court as a life long resident of Mississippi. I have been practicing social work in Mississippi for 28 years. I have been a licensed certified social worker (LCSW) in Mississippi since 1990. I have experience in both the public and private sector. I was employed with the Mississippi Department of Human Services, Division of Family and Children's Services in the following roles: Licensing Unit Director, Prevention Unit Director, Deputy Director, and my most recent employment was as a contractor hired to assist the state in development and approval of the federal Child and Family Service Review Program Improvement Plan. I provide this information to emphasis that as a Mississippi citizen I am passionate about Mississippi's children and committed to the quality of our child welfare system.

I have closely followed the Olivia Y lawsuit with the hope that this attention to Mississippi's foster care system would prompt state leadership including the governor, state legislators and Mississippi Department of Human Services Executive Director to support the Division of Family and Children's Services in taking necessary action to remedy the systemic problems within our child welfare system. The scope of corrective action within the Division will require a substantial and long term financial commitment from the state to adequately fund the necessary changes required within this Division. It is important that the state sustain this funding commitment to support the Division of Child and Family Services over time and not just as a one time appropriation.

I fully support the settlement agreement. I have reviewed and agree with the general recommendations of the expert's who conducted the case record review, fiscal review, and management review specific to Mississippi's lawsuit.

Having reviewed the revised Child and Family Service Review Program Improvement Plan on the agencies website and the progress toward accomplishing the benchmarks and goals, I do have concerns about the agencies capacity to implement and follow through with the agreed upon settlement plan once finalized. Therefore, I am in agreement with strong external oversight and monitoring throughout this process to ensure accountability for achievement of the terms of the settlement plan. I would also strongly recommend that the agency be provided with expert technical assistance to integrate the multiple required agency plans with the final approved settlement plan to provide a clear strategic

map to assist the staff of DFCS in identifying priorities and implementing corrective action to help accomplish their goals and outcomes.

I also support the agency in having access to and utilizing expert consultation and technical assistance resources to assist in the development and implementation of effective outcome based child welfare models and proven best practices.

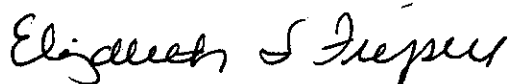
I support the agencies recent efforts for improvements such as the Supervisory Learning Labs which provides on-going training for supervisors and managers across the state. I support the targeted project in Forrest County which is attempting to correct problems within the system but also trying to develop a model county that can be replicated in other areas. I am also supportive of efforts to fully implement family centered practice as a way of doing business and utilizing Family Team Meetings as a vehicle to truly engage families in the decision making process throughout their involvement with the Division.

I would hope that the following recommendations are addressed or included as part of the settlement agreement and plan:

- Caseload Standards based on CWLA standards
- Adherence to Supervisory Ratio's based on CWLA standards
- Adequate personnel qualifications and requirements based on the professional level of job responsibilities per position
- Increase in staffing to include caseworkers, supervisors, support staff, and administrative staff within State Office program areas
- A process for advancement within the system to improve staff retention
- Training as a priority – initial and ongoing training for all staff (supervisors, managers, social workers, caseworkers, licensing, adoption, clerical, homemakers, support staff, etc.) and opportunities for continued professional staff development including participation and representation of Mississippi at federally sponsored and national conferences
- Sufficient staffing of the Training Unit by qualified trainers with the skills and abilities to teach, develop and write quality skill based curricula with the expertise and knowledge of the actual work to be able to provide on the job training
- A quality assurance system that is supported and adequately staffed and a clear system for corrective action when quality assurance issues are identified through the process
- Improved data and information management including tracking performance measures and outcomes.
- Data clean up measures to ensure accurate and correct data entry by the field
- Training and technical assistance for management and supervisory staff to understand data reports and how to use them to improve management practices
- Improved fiscal management to maximize state and federal funding
- Improved grant management including a clear long term plan for outsourcing that will maximize funding to develop needed programs and services to meet the needs of the foster care population statewide and a sustainability plan to ensure programs and services initiated do not just “go away” when the funding is no longer available

- Development of a true public/private provider partnership to create a comprehensive service array throughout the state to meet the needs of the children in foster care not just the "illusion of a partnership"
- A sufficient number of staff dedicated to licensing and adoption based on the actual workload
- Increased targeted recruitment efforts based on the needs of the children in foster care
- Services to improve retention of foster homes/families and to reduce disruptions or unplanned placement moves including therapeutic services, support services and quality training
- Increase in the number and specialized types of foster homes licensed and available to improve placement matching for children in foster care
- A standard placement matching process to ensure that foster children are placed in the most appropriate foster home placement based on their individually assessed needs rather than placement by availability
- Immediate attention to foster care policies, procedures and practices deemed unsafe and or out of compliance with federal or state mandates
- More stringent enforcement of licensing requirements and policies and clear procedures for enforcing penalties when there are violations of those requirements such as revoking the foster home license and closing the foster home to prevent additional placements in an unsafe environment

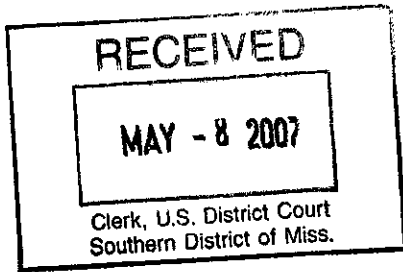
I would like to thank the court for the opportunity to provide input into this settlement process. The problems within Mississippi's child welfare system are long standing and extremely complex. It is clear there is no "quick fix" or easy solution. It will take serious commitment from the governor, state legislators, and state agencies to begin to change the foster care system. It will also take a genuine partnership among all of Mississippi's public systems in collaboration with private providers, and community stakeholders to improve safety, permanency and well-being for Mississippi's families and children. It is time for Mississippi to "do the right thing!" Our children's safety must be paramount. We need to make decisions based on what's in the "best interest" of our children and not based on politics. It is not just the responsibility of the Division of Family and Children's Services but the responsibility of every community and every citizen to become active to ensure a better and safe future for our children and our state.



Elizabeth Shanks Frizsell  
5846 Clubview Drive  
Jackson MS 39211  
Phone: 601-956-8368

cc:  
Eric Thompson  
Rusty Fortenberry

Fitzell  
5846 Clubview Dr  
Jackson MS 39211



Mr. J.T. Noblin, Clerk  
United States District Court  
for the Southern District of MS  
United States Courthouse  
245 East Capitol Street  
Jackson MS 39201

04 MAY 2007 PM 3 T

JACKSON MS 392



39201+2405

